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Fighting With One Arm Behind Our Back:
Cultural Capability in the 21st Century

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After a decade of counterinsurgency, the U.S. Army faces the challenge of preparing for an uncertain and hybrid 21st century threat across the full range of military operations. As it retools for Decisive Action in a fiscally austere environment, it must determine what lessons from the last ten years of conflict have value in shaping the force. The 21st century environment may be marked by uncertainty and volatility, but a surety is that landpower will continue to be employed in the human domain and that domain is comprised of a vast, diverse array of cultures. One lesson taken from Iraq and Afghanistan is that the manner in which the army educates, trains and organizes its Soldiers for operations within various cultures substantially contributes to the success or failure of landpower employment in pursuit of national security interests. A study of the U.S. Army's organizational, education and training approach reveals uneven application and understanding of the principles of cultural capability and its employment at the tactical level. However, the successes and failures of the last ten years yield valuable insights that offer potential alternatives to organizing, educating, and training the force for its 21st century mission.

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After a decade of counterinsurgency, the U.S. Army faces the challenge of preparing for an uncertain and hybrid 21st century threat across the full range of military operations. As it retools for Decisive Action in a fiscally austere environment, it must determine what lessons from the last ten years of conflict have value in shaping the force. The 21st century environment may be marked by uncertainty and volatility, but a surety is that landpower will continue to be employed in the human domain and that domain is comprised of a vast, diverse array of cultures. One lesson taken from Iraq and Afghanistan is that the manner in which the army educates, trains and organizes its Soldiers for operations within various cultures substantially contributes to the success or failure of landpower employment in pursuit of national security interests. A study of the U.S. Army's organizational, education and training approach reveals uneven application and understanding of the principles of cultural capability and its employment at the tactical level. However, the successes and failures of the last ten years yield valuable insights that offer potential alternatives to organizing, educating, and training the force for its 21st century mission.

Fighting With One Arm Behind Our Back:
Cultural Capability in the 21st Century

> We need to stop beating ourselves up about being too much of a COIN-force and not turn our backs on the lessons of the last ten years. War is a very human dimension and will remain so in the complex 21st century security environment.[1]

> Wars are won as much by creating alliances, leveraging nonmilitary advantages, reading intentions, building trust, converting opinions, and managing perceptions—all these tasks demand an exceptional ability to understand people, their culture, and their motivation.[2]

The U.S. Army has pursued two major counterinsurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq for the last decade. As it withdraws from combat and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, it will transition to a Decisive Action force focused on the full range of conflict against hybrid adversaries in a fiscally constrained environment. An integral part of this transition is determining which lessons from the last 10 years of conflict remain valid. One thing remains clear. The 21st century environment will be marked by uncertainty and volatility, meaning the suite of potential conflict areas requiring the employment of U.S. land power will include nearly every region of the world—each having its own array of cultures. The manner in which the army educates, trains and organizes its Soldiers for operations in and amongst diverse cultures will substantially contribute to the success or failure of landpower employment in pursuit of national security interests. Hence, the lessons learned (and those not learned) operating in a culturally capable manner in support of combat and counterinsurgency operations in the last ten years hold particular value for the future.

Chairman Dempsey has tasked every professional to "develop and adopt lessons learned from the past decade of war [and] promote a culture of continuous learning and

adaptation at every echelon of the Joint Force."[3] An organizational and historical study

of the Army's efforts to build a culturally capable force reveals an ambiguous record at

best. Although the Army has invested significant effort, resources and attention to first,

cultural awareness and most recently, cultural capability, it has only achieved marginal

success across the force as a whole. A study of its organizational, education and

training approach reveals uneven application and understanding of the principles of

cultural capability and its employment at the tactical level. However, the successes and

failures of the last ten years yield valuable insights that offer potential alternatives to

organizing, educating and training the force for its 21st century mission. This paper

surveys the broad swath of Army approaches to the challenge of building cultural

capability among Soldiers at the tactical level and makes recommendations in each of

these areas to better posture the 21st century force for its cultural responsibilities across

the globe.

One doesn't have to look hard or long to discover the strategic importance of a

culturally capable force in the 21st century. Whether heroic, good, informed, ill-judged,

ignorant or criminal, U.S. Soldiers' behavior and actions have a significant and far-

reaching impact on the United States' ability to accomplish highly complex and difficult

missions in, and amongst, foreign cultures. A myriad of stakeholders observe, weigh,

and judge American Soldiers' actions and behaviors. Their perceptions have a distinct,

but important, role in successful conflict resolution. Key stakeholders include the

security forces and host-nation government the U.S. partners with, who are responsible

for ensuring lasting security and stability, and the enemy that U.S. forces contend

against, who oftentimes play a political role in conflict termination. Perhaps the most

important stakeholders, in today's information era, are the indigenous population, the international community, and the American people. It is their perceptions, which are influenced by culture, of U.S. troops' actions that affect and sustain the will for military operations.

Countless U.S. Army Soldiers and leaders fully grasp the importance of operating in a culturally aware manner. However, there remain those that either willfully or ignorantly act in a culturally incompetent, or criminal, manner. This has both tactical and strategic consequences. Strategically, high visibility criminal acts, such as Abu Ghraib, the Iron Triangle[4] and instances of U.S. Soldiers murdering innocent Afghan civilians, undermine U.S. military objectives by negatively affecting credibility and support. They stand out as counter to U.S. values and do significant damage to U.S. national security interests. However, these are criminal acts that U.S. Army leaders treat accordingly and prosecute through the Uniform Code of Military Justice. While ensuring justice in these cases certainly stands as an example of our values and culture in action, they are a mere fraction of the culturally significant encounters and frictions associated with U.S. military operations.

Separate from these acts, but of equal strategic import, are the more widespread tactical challenges that come with U.S. Soldiers operating in close proximity to a culturally foreign security force and indigenous population. Most American soldiers have the best of intentions when deploying into a foreign environment. However, if unprepared for the challenges that accompany cultural immersion under adverse and stressful conditions, they can inadvertently become a cultural, ticking time bomb. This bomb can explode quickly and violently as is the case with high-profile and egregious

violations of cultural, social and religious norms. Or, as is more common, friction and misunderstanding borne of ignorance, ethnocentrism and miscommunication undermine the trust and credibility among multi-cultural stakeholders. Although more subtle and slow acting than high-visibility cultural failures, these more common frictions and stressors have an uncertain fuse, but equally deleterious and strategic impact.

The Army's primer for forces deploying to the Middle East acknowledges that in Iraq a "lack of cultural awareness among American forces has led to an increase in animosity among many Iraqis and contributed to a negative image of the U.S. military."[5] In Afghanistan, even after 10 years of operations and experience, the U.S. Army still finds itself routinely conducting consequence management after U.S. Soldiers pose with insurgent corpses, disrespect Afghan elders, security forces and government officials and even inadvertently burn Korans.

The cultural challenge may be more widespread and impactful than these highly visible, but still limited, transgressions indicate. A recent study of the Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar and Laghman (N2KL) provinces of Afghanistan reveals that the cultural divide between U.S. forces on the one side, and Afghan security forces and the populace on the other is not closing. Rather, it is growing after 10 years of partnered operations. The study posits that this growing cultural divide is a key contributing factor in the steadily rising number of insider attacks, where Afghan security forces violently turn on their U.S. partners.[6]

The study's lead behavioral scientist, Dr. Jeffrey Bordin, asserts that "rather than just a result of insurgent infiltration into ANSF [Afghan National Security Forces], indicators exist that many of these fratricide incidents resulted from personal clashes."[7]

The DoD's own recently released *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* lends credence to this conclusion by acknowledging a significant portion of insider attacks, leading to deaths between May 2007 and September 2012, resulted from personal grievances. During this period, a total of 79 Insider attacks occurred with 69 resulting in coalition casualties for a total of 116 coalition dead and 164 wounded. The breakdown of causes following investigation include: 5 (6 percent) due to infiltration; 11 (14 percent) likely due to co-option; 30 (38 percent) due to personal motives; 3 (four percent) have insurgent ties; and 30 (38 percent) remain unknown.[8] The cause of many attacks is unknown, since in most cases the attacker is killed during the incident and it is difficult to determine an exact motive. However, some portion of these unknown attacks are also likely due to personal grievances. If one breaks down the 30 unknown attacks using the same proportions as the known attacks, the potential percentage of attacks due to personal grievances rises from 38% to nearly 50%.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) understands the strategic import of the rise in insider attacks. General John Allen acknowledged the significance of the trend stating, "We are willing to sacrifice a lot for this campaign, but we are not willing to be murdered for it."[9] To reduce the risk of these insider attacks, ISAF has taken significant measures to increase the force protection of U.S. soldiers when operating with, and living alongside, their Afghan partners and has instituted mandatory cultural awareness refresher training for all ISAF personnel. Simultaneously, the Afghan government and security forces are working to improve the vetting process for Afghan recruits while ISAF and ANSF commanders are working with Afghan Religious

and Cultural Affairs officers (RCA) to train and educate ANA soldiers on cultural differences.[10]

Taking measures with Afghan partners to mitigate the potential for cultural conflict is certainly needed, but some are already questioning the time necessary and overarching feasibility of positively influencing Afghans' views of cultural differences with their American partners. Many of the Afghan security forces' most glaring shortcomings are tied to socio-cultural underpinnings in Afghan society at large. For this reason, some see this effort as overreach and insist "any assumption that the United States can create a new culture in the Afghan Army without changing the larger social norms that underpin it is unfounded."[11]

Ultimately, while these measures are certainly appropriate in light of the threat of insider attacks to U.S. troops' safety, they are unlikely to fully address a core causative factor for the attacks, namely the social and cultural misunderstandings and antagonism between Americans and Afghans. Dr. Bordin's study identified a host of factors that contribute to mutual animosity. Afghan complaints include: U.S. convoys not allowing traffic to pass, the Afghan perception of indiscriminate return fire leading to civilian casualties, naïve use of flawed intelligence sources, night raids and home searches, violating female privacy during searches, public search/disarming and humiliation of ANSF members, urinating in public, widespread cursing and insulting Afghan security forces and civilians.[12]

American complaints of ANSF include: pervasive illicit drug use, massive thievery, personal instability, dishonesty, a lack of integrity, incompetence, unsafe weapons handling, corrupt officers, no real NCO corps, covert alliances/informal treaties

with insurgents, high AWOL rates, bad morale, laziness, repulsive hygiene and the torture of dogs.[13] The report reveals that these highly negative American and Afghan views of their partners are widespread and contribute to frequent cultural miscues and friction. They also threaten the trust and credibility of U.S. and Afghan security forces, undermine ISAF efforts to build a capable Afghan security force and ultimately threaten U.S. national security objectives in Afghanistan.

A recent, and more holistic ethnographic study seems to corroborate this view of the insider threat and its strategic implications. The study confirms that in addition to Taliban and Haqqani infiltration and coercion, "cross-cultural friction and contextual stress on Afghan troops are strong contributing factors in the rise of insider attacks."[14] Differing Western, Islamic and Afghan religious practices, value systems and even social norms regarding corruption, breed resentment and contempt between the forces.[15] This cross-cultural friction occurs among Afghan and U.S. soldiers already experiencing contextual stressors (i.e. exhaustion, heat, leadership demands, personal relationships, family concerns and combat).[16] Combined, these cultural challenges and operational conditions put a premium on effective, emotionally attuned leadership, cultural awareness and conflict resolution skills at the small-unit level.[17]   The burden of dealing with these stressors rests on both U.S. and host-nation partner leadership. However, the U.S. military's focus and responsibility for U.S. interests and force protection demands forces optimized and prepared to operate in this environment.

This is not a challenge that will go away just because we've concluded operations in Iraq and are transitioning security responsibility and withdrawing from Afghanistan. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review clearly lays out that stability

operations, large-scale counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations are not niche challenges or solely Special Forces responsibilities. Defense Secretary Robert Gates foretells they are neither "transitory or anomalous phenomenon in the security landscape."[18] Also, the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance places heavy emphasis on "building partnership capacity elsewhere in the world…[where] we seek to be the security partner of choice, pursuing new partnerships with a growing number of nations."[19] These missions are a 21st century requirement necessitating a portfolio of capabilities across the U.S. military and other government departments. Whatever mission the U.S. military executes in the future, the QDR and DSG both acknowledge it will be accomplished with smaller numbers of U.S. forces in a supporting role to host-nation leadership and security forces.

Because of this complex and interdependent security environment, the United States will place a premium on security cooperation activities that include bilateral and multilateral training and exercises, officer exchange programs, educational opportunities at professional military schools, security force assistance and all efforts that build partners' security capacity.[20] In a 21st century environment, where nation-states and organized armies no longer monopolize coercive force, our potential partners will include "foreign militaries or police; local tribal leaders; or people whose long-term ideological agendas differ from ours, but whose near-term interests provide opportunities for pragmatic partnering."[21] Effectiveness in achieving our strategic objectives within this complex, multi-cultural and partnered environment requires an ever more culturally astute and expert force.

A survey of U.S. Army literature, doctrine and field manuals indicates that senior army leaders understand the gravity and import of culture to the 21st century mission. In the mid to late 2000s, there was a virtual explosion of discourse among military periodicals, online forums and across the army regarding the importance of cultural awareness to the success of deployed U.S. forces. The Combat Studies Institute's primer *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for US Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries* acknowledged that preparation and training of Soldiers still "neglect[ed] the role of culture and religion" and was "overly simplistic, typically focusing on lists of do's and don'ts without providing a context for cultural understanding."[22]   The primer presents a methodology and conceptual model to assist in understanding foreign cultures and serves as a theoretical foundation for much of the army's subsequent efforts to improve cultural awareness across the force at the tactical level.

The primer offers a cognitive hierarchy called the Cultural Awareness Pyramid to depict the different levels of cultural proficiency. The hierarchy's levels, from least to most proficient, are: Cultural Consideration ("How and Why"), Knowledge (Specific Training), Understanding (Advanced Training) and Competence (Decision-making and Cultural Intelligence). Each of these capabilities represents a different set of skills since military personnel require different levels of cultural awareness based on their responsibilities and position. The primer depicts a taxonomy of culture, made up of cultural influences (history, religion, traditions, language), cultural variations (behavior, values and ways of thinking), and cultural manifestations (concrete displays of a culture's thought and behavior).[23] Both the model and the primer's subsequent

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discussion of modifying the military's Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) process to account for the paramount importance of culture in operations highlights a growing body of thought that "U.S. military leaders can prepare for and conduct military operations through the lens of cultural awareness."[24] The primer and its model certainly inform many of the Army's subsequent changes to cultural vocabulary, training and education.

As the Army has refined its understanding of the cultural aspects of cross-cultural operations over the last decade, it has gone through several iterations of redefining its vocabulary for this critical domain—from cultural sensitivity to cultural awareness to cultural competence and finally to cultural capability. The 2012 Army Posture Statement states that "Cultural capability enables Soldiers and leaders to understand the 'how and why' of foreign cultures and the roles that culture, religion, and geography play in military operations" and the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS) provides the force's framework and guidance for "building and sustaining an Army with the right blend of culture and foreign language capabilities to facilitate a wide range of operations."[25]

Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) serves as lead for culture and foreign language training and has launched several initiatives in recent years to broaden and deepen Army leaders' cultural understanding and capacity. TRADOC established a network of academic experts across all institutions of Professional Military Education (PME). These experts have incorporated culture and foreign language instruction into existing PME courses at all levels that complements and reinforces previous cultural education efforts from initial entry up to the U.S. Army War College and Sergeant's

Major Academy. The Army is also pursuing initiatives designed to enhance USMA and

ROTC officers' cultural and foreign language proficiency in both language and cultural

immersion programs prior to commissioning.[26]

In 2005, the Army established the TRADOC Culture Center (TCC) at Ft.

Huachuca, Arizona to "develop and deliver relevant and mission-oriented training and

education in all cross-cultural competency aspects."[27] The TCC is now the lead in

training and educating all Army leaders up to the rank of captain by "providing cultural

knowledge and skills training for leadership development, including key leader

engagements, negotiations, rapport building and cross-cultural communications."[28] In

this capacity, the TCC works with the Centers of Excellence to develop and integrate

cultural curriculum into their respective Professional Military Education—including the

Basic Officer Career Courses (BOLC), Captain's Career Courses (CCC), Non-

Commissioned Officer Warrior Leader Course (WLC), Advanced Leader Course (ALC)

and Senior Leader Course (SLC).

The TCC has also shifted from a general training support package (TSP) to a

modular and Area of Operation-specific TSP to meet unit requirements for the

CENTCOM, AFRICOM, and PACOM geographic commands. The new training media

include cultural smart cards for junior enlisted, smart books for NCOs and student

readers for First Sergeants and Commanders.[29] The TCC has begun distributing

immersive, interactive and gaming tools such as the Army 360 Video and the Initial

Military Training/Basic Combat Training (IMT/BCT) Video.[30] The evolution of these

training packages to emphasize cross cultural competence (3C) training represents a

significant step forward for the Army as 3C is a "process-oriented approach to a human-

oriented skill set…emphasis here is on a skill set. Essentially, 3C is teaching the now

forgotten people skills… [of] communication, rapport building and negotiations."[31] The

TCC's shift from cultural awareness to cross-cultural competency based instruction is

still relatively new though, and its use, application, and effectiveness across the force

remain to be seen.

Unit cultural training prior to deployment varies from installation to installation and

unit to unit. However, commanders strive to utilize a variety of options to increase their

Soldiers' cultural capability, to include: TCC-provided training packages; leader

development conferences facilitated by local academia, Human Terrain Teams (HTT)

and Mobile Training Teams (MTT); unit-organized and run leader development

programs using institutional or educational materials; staff rides and familiarization

opportunities with local ethnic communities, and finally, leader reading and professional

development programs that study pertinent cultural and regional works.

Despite these institutional and organizational efforts, the challenges that U.S.

Soldiers continue to have demonstrating cultural capability indicate there is still room for

improvement. Shortfalls in cultural capability are not uncommon, and cumulatively,

have a negative strategic impact on mission accomplishment and U.S. national security.

These indicate the need for a systemic reassessment of how the Army educates and

trains its Soldiers and leaders to prepare them for their multi-cultural missions and

responsibilities.

For a number of understandable reasons, the Army has emphasized a region-

specific methodology to cultural education and training rather than a more general

approach based in the study of psychology and anthropology. The Army had an

obvious regional requirement in the form of ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Therefore, an early focus on Arab-Islamic culture and the Middle East aligned with the

large-scale commitment of troops and resources made in Iraq, and to a lesser degree,

in Afghanistan. Of course, time was also a major constraint as the Army rushed to

provide the force the materiel, tools, education and training necessary to ensure cultural

awareness and then cultural competence in the Iraqi and Afghan campaigns.

However, the Army's regional-focus at the expense of more general and

intellectually based cultural understanding and carried out in a time crunch, largely

resulted in superficial cultural awareness training that many Soldiers and Leaders

perceive as "checking the block." A common refrain among Soldiers is that "so-called

cultural awareness training focuses on do's and don'ts and language basics."[32] Lacking

credible formal instruction, many Soldiers rely either on personal reading or seek out

family, buddies and other Soldiers who either have previous operational and cultural

experience, or in some cases are practicing Muslims.[33]

Other common complaints from Soldiers include: commanders not prioritizing

cultural training and consistently placing warfighter over cultural training; powerpoint

briefs rather than realistic vignette, interactive or roleplay training; cultural training

conducted in less than optimal conditions, such as late in the day when Soldiers are not

focused on the material, or even having Soldiers complete online training during off-duty

hours.[34] In 2008, Department of Defense testimony before a House Armed Services

Committee admitted that most cultural awareness training consisted of "proper and

improper actions in the presence of Arabs…a few Arabic phrases…[and] 60 to 90

minute presentations with no hands-on or vignette training."[35] The testimony went on to

conclude that "this training is recognized as irrelevant and can create a negative perception by the soldiers of the training received….[and] in some cases this training can also give a negative perception of host-nation peoples."[36]

Therefore, despite an early recognition of the importance of culture and the investment of education, training and resources in the post-9/11 era, much of the Army's efforts have been focused solely on the regional-specific and knowledge based aspects of culture. These programs have largely failed to reflect the more anthropologically based approach of culture-general education and training, thereby limiting their effectiveness in developing a culturally competent force. This long-standing fixation on regional-specific, rather than general cultural understanding indicates a failure to truly grasp the cultural impacts on all levels of war, regardless of the country or region of operations. The end result is a force that recognizes the importance of cultural competence, trains in a manner least suited to achieving it and then oftentimes undermines its own efforts at the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war—previously addressed Afghan Insider attacks stand as a prime example.

The Army must change this dynamic by adopting a balanced approach to leader development that better reflects the mutually supporting relationship between regional-specific and culture-general training. Education and development of leaders in core competencies is a pre-requisite to training Soldiers and units in the tasks associated with those competencies. Therefore, the Army must begin with a cultural shift from solely knowledge based and regional-specific cultural training to incorporating more comprehensive culture-general objectives in its cultural training and education.

Cross-cultural competence is comprised of three components: knowledge, affect and skills. Knowledge is an awareness of one's own and an understanding of others' cultural differences. Affect consists of attitudes towards foreign cultures and the motivation to learn about and engage them. Skills are the ability to regulate one's own reactions in a cross-cultural setting, interpersonal skills and the flexibility to see the perspective of someone from a different culture.[37] Regional-specific training focuses almost exclusively on the *knowledge* component; however, *skills* and *affect* make the greatest contribution to successful outcomes in cross-cultural engagements.[38] In other words, without highly developed *skills* and *affect*, the region-specific *knowledge* is useless since you are left without the capability to effectively utilize the knowledge. Thus, much current Army cultural training is focused on the least important aspect of the three components of cross-cultural competence and you're left with a force deficient in the areas of *skills and affect,* as evidenced by Insider Attack studies.

Unlike the Army, the U.S. Marine Corps has embraced a culture-general approach with its concept of *operational culture*. The Marine Corps defines *operational culture* as "those aspects of culture that influence the outcome of a military operation" within the dimensions of the physical environment, economy, social structure, political structure, and belief systems.[39] This approach identifies cultural differences and similarities in these dimensions and focuses on key societal constructs such as kinship, politics, and religion. While operational culture is built on a solid intellectual basis of anthropological models and is useful in predicting how individuals in one culture will behave relative to those of another culture, "it does not necessarily provide an understanding of the relative importance of various values and norms within that

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culture…and does not sufficiently prepare personnel to interact with *individual* members of the culture."[40] So, there are limitations to both methods; the region-specific or knowledge-based approach tends to treat cultures as static and the general-culture model does not account for multiple different competing cultural identities (national, ethnic, religious, tribal) in the same individual or the influence of individual personality on behavior. However, the Marines' *operational culture* approach does provide the Marine a construct for lifelong learning whereby their "conceptual knowledge can literally 'travel anywhere,' and can be applied to diverse environments."[41]

Ultimately, a growing body of professionals sees the combination of these two approaches as the most effective methodology to gain cultural knowledge, awareness and understanding. Cross-cultural competence is built on all three components of knowledge, affect and skills. Army efforts to educate and develop the *affect* and *skills* components must focus on reducing ethnocentrism and developing open-minded flexibility, interpersonal and coping skills. Research demonstrates that "interpersonal skills tend to make stronger contributions than even language proficiency or prior international exposure" to cultural competence.[42] As previously determined, the Army's region and knowledge-based method does not provide a balanced approach that results in life-long learning that optimizes cultural competency across diverse environments. That is why the Army must shift its efforts from predominantly region-specific knowledge to a more balanced approach of regional expertise and general-culture understanding of interpersonal skill sets that are transferable among different settings and cultures.

These complex cognitive skills are best developed over a lifetime of education as a part of Professional Military Education. Fortunately, much of the Army's leadership

doctrine and development is organized within competencies that are conducive to the integration of the *affect* and *skills* components of cross-cultural competence. Just one example is the above-mentioned cultural skill of flexibility, which parallels the competency of agility in Army leadership doctrine.[43] With additional study, there are most certainly other areas of nexus between military leadership and cultural *affect* and *skills* that warrant further consideration as potential adjustments to current Professional Military Education programs.

Ultimately, the Army of the 21st century must recognize cultural competence as a key leader competency and then establish systems that ensure education and training by those leaders that reflects established and effective pedagogical methods.[44] This is no small task, as the Army must deal with this daunting challenge while balancing competing mission essential requirements in a fiscally austere environment. However, it can navigate these with appropriate senior leader emphasis on the importance of cultural capability within a Decisive Action construct and by educating its Soldiers and leaders. Education will provide Soldiers and leaders the general cultural expertise necessary to illustrate the importance of cultural competence to their mission and offer them the intellectual tools necessary to properly plan, prepare and execute to standard cultural training.

As the Army rebalances education and training to better capitalize on the opportunities of a holistic 'general-culture and region-specific' approach, it must ensure leaders demonstrate appropriate command emphasis on the effort. The challenges to doing this will only grow as much of the Army's guidance, training and resources shift towards the requirements of Decisive Action. However, introducing key cultural tasks

into commanders' Mission Essential Task Lists (METL) and/or supporting Leader tasks that drive training focus, time and resources towards cultural competence would be a positive step forward. Additionally, the force must determine appropriate reporting venues such as Quarterly Training Briefs (QTB) or Army Command and Training Briefs (ACTB) where leaders back brief senior leadership on their cultural training plans and provide assessments of progress or issues.

The last decade of diverse and ambiguous conflict has yielded other leadership insights that might be of equal benefit to both the cultural competence of our leaders and their effectiveness in a complex 21st century environment. Some senior Army leaders are suggesting a shift from solely traditional and hierarchical leadership, based on control, to a non-hierarchical approach, whereby leaders lead by the power of persuasion, logic and common purpose. Lieutenant General James Dubik sees this peer, horizontal, or persuasive leadership as better suited to the effort to lead "among tribal chiefs, religious leaders...and foreign leaders."[45] Education and leader development in the field of non-hierarchical leadership could complement efforts to reinforce an intercultural outlook on the part of Army leaders and better prepare them for the networked nature of the 21st century environment.

PME provides the most fertile seedbed for implementing efforts to improve cultural capability Army-wide. As an individual passes through sequential gates of learning throughout their career, they would be exposed to incremental, and increasingly more complex and sophisticated, cultural concepts and experiences as a part of their lifelong pursuit of cultural education as a core competency. Subsequently, at each level of responsibility, Army sergeants, staff sergeants, lieutenants and captains

would be better prepared to plan, prepare, and execute high-quality training that is culturally relevant. As the profession becomes more culturally adept, its leaders will develop a more nuanced appreciation for culture as both a condition of operating environments and also focus their energies on the critical leader tasks supporting cultural competency. This holistic educational approach has the potential to change an entire generation of leaders in terms of their level of buy-in to cultural competency, motivation to implement its concepts, and creativity in conducting culturally relevant unit training—thus enhancing the Army's ability to operate effectively across the various regions of the globe.

Of course, improvements to unit cultural training are where the Army stands to make the most widespread and impactful gains across the force. Breakdowns in cultural awareness and understanding rarely occur among more senior Non-Commissioned and Commissioned Officers; they tend to happen in the much larger population of young, enlisted Soldiers. There are many reasons for this that include: high daily inter-cultural exposure and contact between these Soldiers and host-nation security forces and the populace; still developing maturity and life-skills; differing socio-economic backgrounds and ethnocentric world-views; and individuals with fewer pre-military intercultural experiences and less developed cultural coping skills. These Soldiers are most susceptible to culturally insensitive or damaging behaviors and oftentimes operate in a diffuse and decentralized 21st century environment beyond the immediate control of their more culturally capable leaders, who benefit from highly developed interpersonal skills based on a career of experience.

However, the Army continues to focus its higher order efforts at building cultural competency on leaders and relies on the less effective, knowledge-based methods such as cultural awareness in training soldiers.   The Director of the TCC's observation that current 3C skill development necessary for operational effectiveness will vary across the spectrum of command and occupation [and] 3C requirements will be different for higher ranking officers in command than for privates or staff NCOs or other personnel on foreign ground" is highly suggestive.[46] It appears both Army leadership and the most influential mechanisms for change have accepted the inherent challenges of training and educating enlisted soldiers by uncritically following the cultural awareness pyramid construct in apportioning different levels of training and education to Soldiers of differing rank and responsibility.

This is not to argue that a senior leader engaging a government official or security official shouldn't have a higher level of cultural competence than a private out on patrol. However, if the privates and specialists of the Army are having significantly more cultural exchanges than the senior leader and they're less prepared to interact in a culturally adept manner, there is potential for more frequent and even far-reaching cultural failures. The Army must rethink its rank and position bias and increase the education and training objectives for these Soldiers from merely cultural knowledge to cultural understanding or even competence. All ranks require a combination of education in cultural concepts and training or application in those concepts to truly achieve their greatest potential in cultural capability.

Recent research indicates that leaders might be surprised at soldiers' cultural insight and competence when they've had an opportunity to properly prepare for a

mission with significant cultural overtones. The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment's 2010-11 deployment as advisors supporting the Iraqi Army serves as an example. While 3ACR Soldiers displayed cultural tendencies that created cross-cultural challenges (especially impatience, urgency and directness), they also showed an interesting capacity to intuitively determine the greatest cultural challenges to their advising mission and creatively resolve them. Some common success stories included: understanding and committing to significant investments in time and patience to build trust and relationships; recognition of the importance of a sincere desire to learn and experience new phenomena, subtlety, persistence and cultural accommodation, respect, friendliness and goodwill. Finally, the study concludes that these Soldiers' intercultural capability originated in their transformational leadership practices and firm groundings in socially responsible organizational values.[47]

These values and practices provide a strong foundation upon which to build more sophisticated leadership skillsets and cultural capability in both our professional military education for leaders and cultural training for Soldiers across the force. There are indications that after a decade of conflict and exposure to other cultures, a growing number of Soldiers are both aware of the operational importance of cultural competence and motivated to achieve a higher level of capability. This is not to say that the entire force is culturally capable; there remains evidence to the contrary. However, recent studies and observations indicate a growing body of Soldiers and leaders are not merely culturally aware, but predisposed towards cultural competence based on their past experiences.[48]

The Army must exploit this opportunity as it transitions stateside and evaluates its lessons learned and the way ahead in educating and training the force for Decisive Action in an environment characterized by hybrid threats. The current *Army Training Strategy* (ATS) indicates an appreciation for this in its focus on adapting leader competencies to meet operational needs.[49] Alongside traditional competencies, the ATS tasks leaders with mastering decentralized operations that include negotiation with local citizens, employing mission command and engaging with Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multi-National (JIIM) partners. The strategy also emphasizes emerging leader competencies such as regional culture and language, the human domain and adaptive and critical thinking skills.[50] As the Army withdraws from Afghanistan and reorients on the full spectrum of potential military conflict, many of its young, but experienced Soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers can serve as a vanguard of culturally aware proponents of increasingly more sophisticated training strategies.

The Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) is one example of a training venue that is currently pushing to conduct sophisticated cultural competence training at more junior soldier levels. In addition to cultural, negotiation and engagement training, JRTC offers units the opportunity to have Soldiers at the squad and platoon level conduct Street Level Engagement (SLE) exercises. This training consists of a round-robin series of cultural engagements that primarily Squad Leaders and below conduct with cultural role-players to train and test their rapport-building, negotiation and cultural competency skills in a culturally demanding and realistic environment.[51] As JRTC transitions from counterinsurgency mission rehearsal exercises to Decisive Action

rotations comprised of a hybrid threat, the CTC will modify its training objectives and methodologies. SLEs and other examples of innovative cultural training must not be a casualty to other training objectives; rather, JRTC and the Army at large must leverage and adapt their training methodologies to replicate complexity and hybrid threats in the institutional classroom, at home station and while deployed.[52]

Of course, by virtue of their core training mission of validating deploying units, the CTCs are better postured in the areas of resources, subject matter expertise and training infrastructure to support this sophisticated shift in cultural training. In comparison, individual units and leaders at home station face a host of challenges including: competing requirements, limited resources, varying command emphasis and an institutional priority to refocus on the basic warfighter tasks associated with Decisive Action. However, the Army is making some organizational changes that warrant some optimism that building cultural capability will not be a casualty in its effort to remission.

The Army's decision to regionally align Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) with geographic combatant commands is an innovative re-missioning of its forces that promises to not only safeguard the gains of the last ten years of growing cultural competence, but also offers the potential to significantly improve its cultural education and training of the force by providing more focus, time and expertise to these efforts. General Raymond Odierno points out that the Army has learned many lessons over the last 10 years, "but one of the most compelling is that – whether you are working among the citizens of a country, or working with their government or Armed Forces – nothing is as important to your long term success as understanding the prevailing culture and values."[53] There are many advantages that accrue to this approach; most importantly,

Soldiers and leaders will have an extended and intensive regional focus that allows the time and resources necessary for a much deeper understanding of a region's cultures. Resultant culturally relevant training has the potential to serve as a combat multiplier for individual Soldiers, become second nature to aligned units, and lead to benefits in operations, planning and host nation partnering.[54]

The manner in which the Army carries out this regional alignment remains to be seen though. The Army must avoid learning the wrong lesson from the last decade and building a force of compartmentalized and regionally focused units at the expense of general culture education and training. This would only perpetuate and institutionalize a past tendency towards inadequate region-specificity. Developing a sophisticated culture-general approach to education is the foundation upon which any regional-specific orientation must rest. The Army currently has the opportunity to build a force more versed in the deepest nuances of a region's specific culture, while retaining a cross-cultural appreciation and competence derived from culture-general education. This combination of competencies provides the force a greater capacity for units trained for missions in one region to shift more quickly and effectively to another. Nick Dowling, a former National Security Council director, who runs the culture-training company IDS International contends that "Anthropologically, socially, economically, [Soldiers] will have to reset what the answers are, but the right questions will already be in their mind."[55]

To achieve the full potential of the realignment, the Army must make changes in its antiquated personnel system and how it organizes and partners the force for Special Operations Forces (SOF)/General Purpose Forces (GPF) integration. First, the Army

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must alter its personnel system to stabilize soldiers in units with like regional alignments. Language and cultural training for a specific region are costly, time-intensive and particularly perishable skills, so the Army must consider home-steading within units "to retain the regional expertise and personal relationships built by soldiers during their tours in aligned units."[56] Additionally, it must revise both its reenlistment and retention programs to encourage unit stabilization without damaging Soldiers' careers. Finally, the Army must also assess its current NCO and officer evaluation, counseling, and promotion systems to incorporate cultural competence as a leader attribute and promulgate suitable cultural expertise at increasingly higher ranks in the force. These changes won't be easy or inexpensive for the Army. If cost or environmental conditions preclude any or all of these recommendations, the importance of culture-general education only increases as a way of offsetting the functional gap.

Second, Special Forces Groups and their supporting units must partner with Brigade Combat Teams and other enabling units in habitual training relationships whereby conventional forces can regularly benefit from SOF language, regional and general-cultural expertise in education and training. There are significant long-term benefits in terms of operational familiarity that result from these habitual relationships. However, from a cultural perspective, SOF operators would provide an example of cultural competence at all ranks that would have a wide-ranging positive impact on the Army's efforts to push cultural competence down to the lowest level. Their language and regional expertise would also be particularly helpful to a generation of young leaders that understand the importance of cultural competence, but have yet to develop

the regional-specific and culture-general expertise to build a comprehensive cultural training program— in effect, SOF would serve as *skills* and *affect* mentors.

After ten years of counterinsurgency and the accompanying mission of building foreign security force capacity, both SOF and GPF are increasingly adept and comfortable in employing partnered relationships in training and mission accomplishment. SOF/GPF integration would be an important approach that develops a mindset in units where culture is viewed as a mission enabler rather than a mission inhibitor. Education of leaders and training of Soldiers would benefit from a habitual SOF/GPF relationship whereby these partnered training teams integrate cultural skill building into unit training plans that include practice in cross-cultural communication, rapport building and negotiations.

These organizational and personnel changes compliment previously discussed recommendations for adjustments to the methodology with which the Army educates and trains its soldiers in pursuit of cultural capability. They are just some of the major steps the Army can take to build cross-cultural capability across the force. Appendix A provides additional measures that can and should be taken. Ultimately, education of a cadre of young, veteran Soldiers and leaders in the core principles of culture-general competence, with continuing efforts in regional-specific understanding is priority one. This must be accomplished in a sequential and holistic fashion at every step of the professional military education process.

Although past experience indicates the need for a balanced approach of culture-general and regional-specific competence, the Army may have to make tough choices with limited resources in a fiscally austere environment. If this occurs, it must

implement institutional changes promoting culture-general competence across all ranks to establish a strong and transferrable cultural capability across the force in the event that regional-specific measures becomes unsustainable or impractical. This means that the institutional and operational Army must also open their respective cultural apertures to provide the tools, resources and training necessary to push cultural competence down to the individual Soldier. Finally, the Army must promote innovative organizational and training approaches that systematize cultural lessons learned and provide an increasingly culturally astute force across all ranks and in all operational environments.

In closing, rather than more of the same type of cultural awareness and knowledge-based training, the Army must raise its standards, widen its scope, and alter its training objectives and methodology to properly prepare forces to operate in the complex 21st century strategic environment, an environment which requires forces capable of operating across multiple regions of the globe. Achieving success in this environment requires culturally competent forces. This requirement will only grow in a 21st century environment marked by U.S. general purpose forces and special operations forces assuming an increasingly supporting and enabling role as partners to foreign security forces. As the Army's cultural primer acknowledges, "America's armed forces cannot 'surge' cultural expertise, nor can they expect complex interpersonal skills and cultural cognition to develop when placed in competition with fundamental military skill sets."[57] Now is the time for the Army to conduct a reassessment of its entire approach to educating and training a culturally capable force for the 21st century.

As the Army completes its transition and withdrawal from Afghanistan, there is the risk that it will throw itself into the next operational paradigm, become fixated on the

projected requirements of Decisive Action and forget the lessons it has learned from ten years of conflict. However, it also has the opportunity to accept the expanded cultural capabilities resident across the force, alter its cultural training methodologies accordingly and creatively organize, educate and train an integrated force. If this occurs, there is great potential for a heretofore unseen culturally capable 21st century U.S. Army. That force would be comprised of professionals at all levels educated in general cultural tenets and the region-specific characteristics so critical to effective cross-cultural operations. Assuming warfare remains a truly human domain in the 21st century, the U.S. Army will have made a significant step forward in converting tactical, cultural competence into positive and lasting strategic effects whenever its boots hit the ground across the globe.

<div align="center">Endnotes</div>

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Appendix A

RECOMMENDATIONS

<u>Education</u>

- Professional Military Education (NCOES/OES): alter all PME programs of instruction to include both general-culture and region-specific education and include an overview of pertinent cultural models and theories with practical exercises and demonstrations.
- Increase pre-commissioning and pre-enlistment opportunities for language, cultural immersion and general-culture courses to raise the level of soldiers and leaders' cultural understanding prior to entry into service.
- Tie cultural interpersonal and engagement skills to existing leadership doctrine and development (ie. incorporate cultural flexibility into the leader competency of agility).
- Senior leadership may consider adding readings to their Professional Reading List that highlight cultural dynamics.
- Develop non-hierarchical leadership skills in leaders, which compliment cultural education and training approaches and enhance cross-cultural, partnered and interagency operations.

<u>Training</u>

- Expand cultural competency training to the entire force vice focusing cultural competency on leaders and conducting cultural awareness with junior soldiers.
- Revise cultural competency training to include appropriate emphasis on all components of cultural capability (knowledge, affect, and skills).
- Maintain cultural and engagement training at the CTCs and determine how to integrate them into Decisive Action training rotations to ensure cultural competence as a training objective in both DA and COIN mission rehearsal exercises.
- Integrate cultural training tasks into Decisive Action training.
- Allocate funding/resources necessary for unit commanders to conduct language and cultural training as a part of the full range of military operations (Decisive Action)
- Develop reporting requirements to ensure leader and unit compliance at all command levels (QTBs/ACTBs)
- METL: consider cultural awareness as a METL task for all regionally aligned forces.

- Homestation training programs should explore the origins of particular cultures (within the RAB's assigned region) and conduct integrated SOF/GPF training using practical exercises.
- Language Training: assess all Soldiers for language proficiency and conduct continuous language training by region (expand the Language Enabled Soldier program to be continuous in nature and not limited to pre-deployment).

Organizational/Other

- Regionally Align Forces/BCTs: align early; ensure pre-mission incorporation of regional culture into training, leader development, and soldier education.
- Habitually align Regionally Aligned BCTs with SF Groups: increase contract at soldier/leader level; build partnered approach to training that incorporates SOF language/regional/cultural skillsets into unit training plans; incorporate SF training material, TTPs, philosophy into all collective training (not just pre-deployment training).
- Feedback: senior leadership must assess its feedback mechanisms for the implementation of education, leader development, and training of cultural competence. Develop measures of effectiveness and opportunities for feedback from the force on the state of cultural competence integration during transition to Decisive Action.
- Administrative: evaluation, counseling and promotion systems must incorporate cultural sensitivity, awareness and communication as appropriate competencies.
- Alter personnel system to stabilize soldier/leader assignments within regionally aligned units and include regional and cultural expertise as an assignment consideration.